

Eastern vs. Western Yoga Practices

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INTRODUCTION

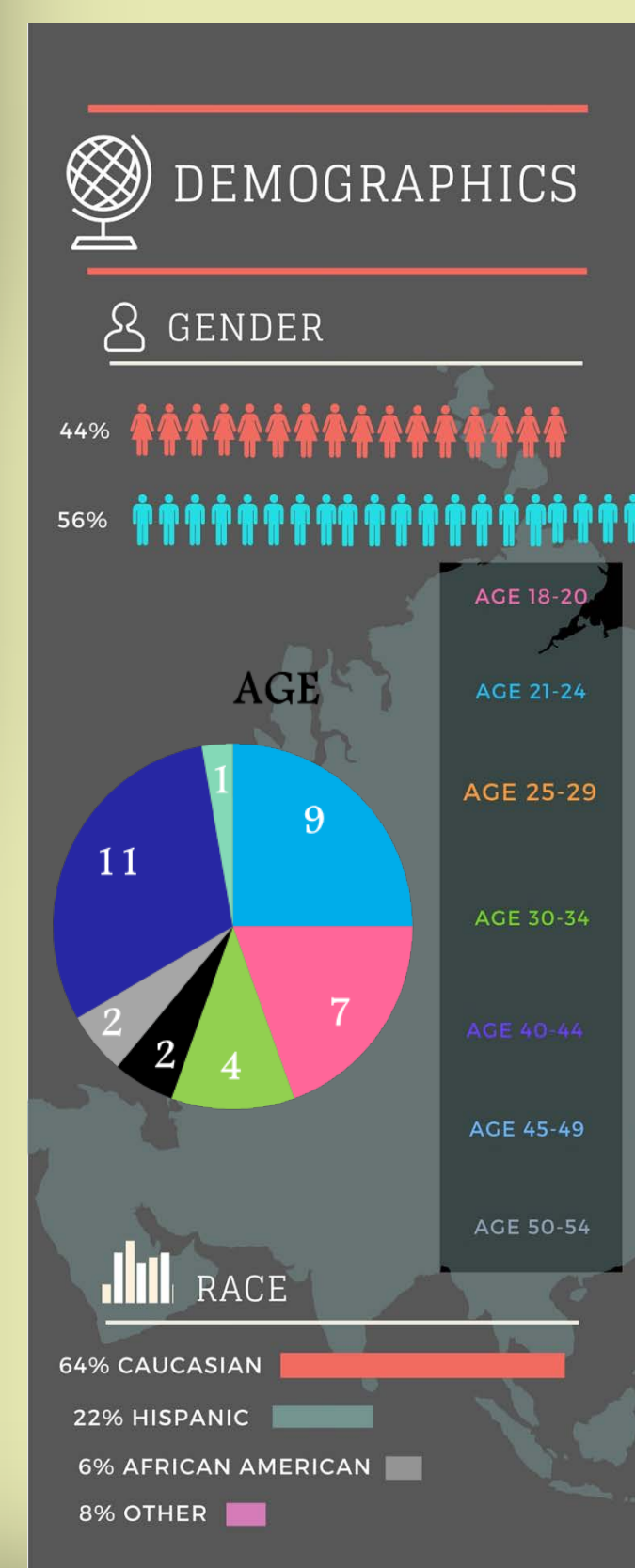
The beginnings of yoga can be traced back over 5,000 years originating in ancient India. While we are slowly beginning to realize the connection of physical and mental wellness here in the western world, eastern countries have incorporated a daily practice of holistic health into their lives for centuries.

The purpose of this study was to assess the difference in cultural mindset of health, wellness, fitness, and yoga in our western culture compared to a distant eastern tradition. A survey was given to examine western customs of health, healing practices, medicinal practices, and cultural influence.



METHODS

36 participants of all ages over 18 were given surveys. The distribution methods included passing surveys out to participants of ASU academic classes, group-exercise classes, faculty, and members of the community. Distribution methods also included placing surveys in a designated location and making an announcement to notify other members of the survey. An empty envelope was located at all survey stations for the collection of the completed surveys. The survey collected demographic data, knowledge of eastern and western cultures, general information about fitness, health, spirituality, and perceived knowledge of yoga practice. The most frequently observed category of gender surveyed was male ($n = 20, 56\%$). The most frequently observed range of age surveyed was the 25-29 category ($n = 11, 31\%$). The most frequently observed category of race was Caucasian, ($n = 23, 64\%$). The most frequently observed category of dominant hand use was the right hand ($n = 28, 78\%$).



RESULTS

Cultural Examination

When asked if bilingual, the most frequently observed category of was “no” ($n = 27, 75\%$). For the question, “have you travelled outside of the U.S.A.?” the most frequently observed category of was “yes” ($n = 24, 67\%$). The most frequently observed category of visiting a third world country was “no” ($n = 30, 83\%$). As for the furthest comfortable traveling, most answered “to a different continent” ($n = 20, 56\%$). It was noted that most answered “yes”, ($n = 20, 56\%$) they are comfortable travelling abroad by themselves.

Spirituality

When asked “do you meditate or pray”, the most frequently observed category of was “yes” ($n = 25, 69\%$). On spirituality, frequently observed was the response “yes”, ($n = 29, 83\%$), most consider themselves spiritual.

Health

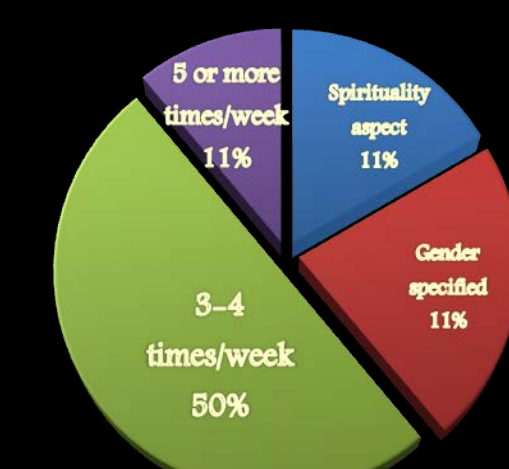
Examining health topics, the most frequent answer when asked if they consider themselves healthy was “yes” ($n = 17, 47\%$). The most frequently observed category of doctors’ visits was “every once in a while” ($n = 18, 50\%$). When asked if they eat a balanced diet, a wide majority chose “some of the time” ($n = 14, 39\%$). The most frequently observed category of eating beef was “yes” ($n = 35, 97\%$). For the use of conventional medicine, the most frequent answer was “sometimes” ($n = 22, 61\%$). As for holistic medicine, most answered “never” ($n = 17, 47\%$).

Exercise

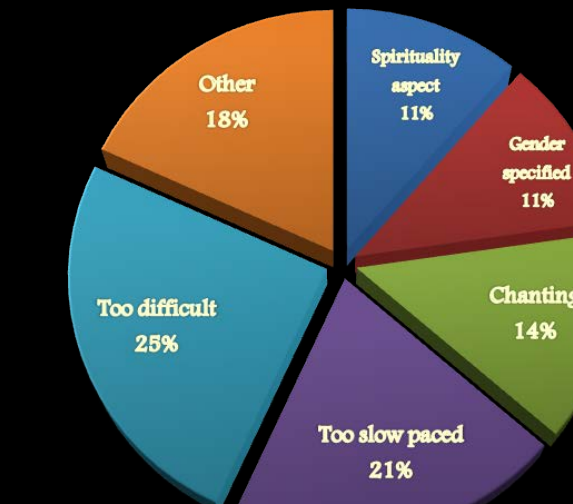
The most frequently observed category of exercise was 3-4 times per week ($n = 18, 50\%$).

DIAGRAM OF STIMULI

I engage in vigorously/moderately intense exercise for at least 30-60 min per day.



Which of the following would keep you from practicing yoga?



CONCLUSIONS

Yoga

When asked “where did you first learn or hear about yoga”, the frequent answer was “from friends/family”, ($n = 18, 51\%$). The question “do you practice yoga or attend yoga classes” frequently observed the answer “no”, ($n = 26, 72\%$). For the question “how many yoga classes have you attended”, the answer was “zero”, ($n = 11, 31\%$). For the small percentage who *had* taken yoga classes ($n=10, 28\%$), the reason behind taking yoga classes was measured. The most frequently observed answer was “for flexibility”. According to the surveyed data, most expect a typical yoga class should be primarily for flexibility. Second was yoga should include meditation, self-realization, and strength training.

Having a better understanding of cultural differences provides a solid foundation for future research to explore alternative medicine, holistic healing and health sciences. In addition to providing this data, participants have allocated information about yoga programs they would like to see offered at their facility, what they expect from a yoga practice, as well as why they do or do not currently participate in yoga programs.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS...

Further research examining cultural differences specific to medicinal practices, holistic sciences, and eastern cultures are warranted. Collecting more data would be most beneficial to the study. This will help include multiple age ranges surveyed and special populations such as in geriatrics and children. Many of the surveys given were handed out in the Center of Human Performance at Angelo State University. This may have this created a bias in the “fitness/exercise” category. A more heterogeneous sample may have generated responses that are more representative of the general population.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Further Information

For more information, visit Ma Meera Anand Yoga at Meerayogatx.com

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